Lindenbaum, Shirley 2004

Dr. Shirley Lindenbaum Oral History 2004

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Shirley Lindenbaum Interview

Office of NIH History Oral History Program

Interviewer: Maya Ponte

Interviewee: Shirley Lindenbaum

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Beginning of transcript

Interview: If first I could ask you to tell me a little bit about your childhood, growing up in Australia, where you lived and what your childhood was like.

Shirley Lindenbaum: Well, I lived in a suburb of Melbourne and I went to local state school, and then a secondary school for two years, which was a state school, which was horrible. Then my parents sent me to a Methodist school. There were a couple of really good schools run by different churches -- three or four good schools run by three of four different churches, but also a state high school but that was even further away from where I lived.

So I went to something called Methodist Ladies College, in Melbourne. That was a terrific school, really academically interesting. I had lifelong friends who still visit me, we're in touch. It had to be -- music section, had a whole section of the school that was devoted to -- had a piano in every room, and you could hear people playing piano, so we sang madrigals. I did a lot of sports, hockey team, the swimming team, I had a really good time. First time I really got interested, and I was about 14 I guess by then, I really got interested, 13 maybe, in education. The first time I started to take an interest in anything at school. I had a brother who was four years older than me, he and I got on very well. He had gone to different state schools for boys, and we're still very close to one another. Our parents had not been able to afford to go to school beyond the age of 14 themselves but they read a lot and encouraged us. A pretty good time, fond memories of my Australian childhood. But I find life outside Australia a bit more interesting.

Interviewer: [laughs] Did you travel much when you were young? If you could tell me a little about how you first became interested in anthropology or what led to that?

SL: What led to that is something quite interesting. I had traveled, most Australians stayed in -- get out of Australia or did in those days, I imagine they still do. I went to England-- or no that wasn't first -- yes it was first. My first year at the university and I decided to go to England, as everybody did, and I studied a year in England. I did typing and shorthand at that time so I learned my way around London and so forth for some time, working at a lawyer's office and going to plays and theater in London. My brother was at Oxford at that time. I was allowed to do that because my brother was at Oxford with his wife. And he was doing a PhD at Oxford. His wife had studied philosophy at Melbourne University but she had a baby about that time. This is a really long story but we're still on track here. And I came back home and they came back home, and she began to tell me that after I left, she decided that she was bored of just taking care of a little baby because my brother was studying and she enrolled in the anthropology department at Oxford. And she studied with Evans-Pritchard -- that summer when they came home at the beach together and she told me a lot about anthropology and I said, "Boy, that sounds terrific." So I sold everything I had including my little Volkswagen and went to Sydney. There was no anthropology being taught in Sydney, in Melbourne at that time. I went to Sydney and studied anthropology at Sydney, which turned me around. I just felt I had arrived home by then.

Interviewer: And who did you work with at Sydney? Who were some of your mentors?

SL: They were a very strong Melanesian Department. Melvin Mengott [spelled phonetically], who worked in Western Highlands at [unintelligible], and Ian Holdman [spelled phonetically] who worked in Melata and Warbiol [spelled phonetically]. Those were the main two that I remember. We heard a lot about Papa New Guinea in the course of their lectures and the readings they were giving to us.

Interviewer: What kind of things did you learn, and if you could tell me a little bit about how you chose that place to do your fieldwork and what you intended to study when you first went there?

SL: I was coming to the end of my studies in Sydney, and I married Robert Glove [spelled phonetically] -- during my last year as a student I was married to Robert Glove. And he had done fieldwork already in Papa New Guinea with the Huli and he did his dissertation on the Huli. He was an American who had come to New Guinea. And a request came in from the department of genetics at the University of Adelade for some anthropologists to go to New Guinea to work on the kuru project. And specifically they wanted what they called -- well, the University of Adelade, Department of Genetics was headed by a man called John Bennett [spelled phonetically], who had a genetic hypothesis about kuru. Kuru was already known from the 1950s reports of Zigas and Gajdusek by then. This is the late '50s, probably 1960 I'm talking about now. They wanted what they called pedigrees, because they had an idea that -- they wanted genealogical information about the Fore mainly, and about Fore lifestyles. They assumed that with the geneticists background that pedigrees were biologically accurate, and so that's what we were sent to do. So we read up on kuru and everything that was known about it and on the Eastern Highlands-- there were a few reports in on the Eastern Highlands by then. [unintelligible] had written High Valley, somebody worked among the Banda-Banda [spelled phonetically], Lulu Agnes had worked among the Banda-Banda, and there were general reports that were available to read about the Eastern Highlands. And the Burnts, Ronald and Catherine Burnt [spelled phonetically] had worked in the Fore. Their book wasn't out yet, *Excess and Restraint*, which was mid-1960s, but they had articles out, knew a little bit about the Eastern Highlands, and a little bit about kuru. And we went there specifically to study kuru, at the request of the University of Adelade.

Interviewer: That's so interesting. So you were basically requested by the genetics department, which you said was under the direction of John Bennett [spelled phonetically] at the time, to actually do this project in a sense to sort out the hypothesis they had.

SL: Information they didn't want. Inaccurate information that genealogies are not biologically accurate and that kuru had not been around for long, which was not what the geneticists thought. And that [unintelligible] the Fore community down a distinctive path from the north, just in northern borders when we were at the turn on the century, entering the middle of the central-south Fore we were located at, so around the 1930s and then went further south during the 1930s. So we tracked an epidemiological path of entry where named persons who were the victims of it, who died of it, and during that survey where we walked from north to central to south gathering the names of people who were remembered as first victims, we found that they hadn't been cannibals for long either and that there were almost an overlap, almost two maps that you could put together that overlaid one another that cannibalism had come in first and then the kuru cases emerged a few years later in those places. So that's what we came back with.

Interviewer: Right. That was exactly that -- that took a little while to get there, so if we could go back a little bit and just walk through how you came to that point.

SL: We knew that the central area of the Southern Fore had the highest incidence of kuru, because Gajdusek and Zigas had done some surveys, some patrols, and had reported that, so we knew that was the case, it was very high incident of kuru at that time, 1961 we went. And we didn't want to be in the north. There was one patrol post in the north Fore at Okapa Station, and we didn't want to be to near Okapa Station with all the administrative officers and the police force. And there was one road down through the South Fore, and so we didn't want to be at the bottom of the road, which was about 18 miles from Okapa Station because there was a missionary down there who'd been there for a couple of years.

Interviewer: Who was the missionary?

SL: I'm just trying to recall his name.

Interviewer: If you can't remember it it's okay because what I'll do is I'll send you the transcript --

SL: I've missed the beginning of your sentence.

Interviewer: Oh I was just going to say if you can't remember it don't worry about it right now, we'll catch it later.

SL: Yes [unintelligible] not going to be able to remember them -- I'll come across it in a minute. I've got a list of names here that keep popping up into my head over time. [laughs] Anyway, I'll give you his name in a minute. Mr. James, his name I think was Mr. James, I forget what his first name was. So he was an evangelical Christian from the United States and he and his wife and little child lived behind a barricaded fence 18 miles south.

So we landed down midway -- the district officer at Okapa, the government officer at Okapa, his name was Myrt Brytwell [spelled phonetically], he was a very helpful, sort of crusty old guy who presented himself with a hard exterior and had a heart of gold, gave us a government vehicle. We had just arrived that night at Okapa station. The next day he gave us a government vehicle with a driver to drive south and find a place to do fieldwork. So we didn't want to be near the Okapa station, we didn't want to be near the missionary at the bottom and as we got halfway down, about 12 miles from the station with a crowd of Fore on the road who stopped us because there were no vehicles pretty much going through there then, only this one government vehicle was the only vehicle that went through in those days. And so they sort of crowded on the road to see what it was and so we got out and we spoke with them and they said, "Stay with us." And so we thought, "Well this is auspicious," you know. They took us into the hamlet and showed us an empty building that was about twelve feet square, had bamboo walls, matting walls, and thatched roof and it was empty. And they said it that was a local church that the missionary in the South Fore, Mr. James, had encouraged local groups that he was evangelizing to build in their communities, and he would come around on a kind of circuit from time to time and hold church services in these buildings. So most of the time it was empty and so they said, "Okay, you can live in that." And so we did. We went back to Okapa Station and told Myrt Brytwell we were going to start, and the next day back we came with supplies and landed down in the -- in the church. And Myrt Brytwell also lent us, at the same time, a government carpenter who was not a Fore but he was a Papa New Guinean, I think from the coast. He spoke Melanesian Pidgeon and we communicated with him.

And he supervised the construction of our house. The Fore really built it, brought in materials from the forest and the women brought in the Kuni [spelled phonetically] from the grasslands for the thatch and he supervised the construction of our field house, and we also got a few things from the government station like a pot-bellied stove and a bit of metal to put around the pipe so the thatch didn't burn. So that's how we settled into the Fore, and very quickly, within 48 hours of arriving in the Eastern Highlands I think we, maybe three days we landed already in the field site.

Interviewer: And what supplies did you bring with you?

SL: We had two sorts of supplies, we sent a bunch of stuff ahead by mail, a month or two before to a post office in Kainantu, which was the Eastern Highlands administrative center at that time. It's no longer there, the Eastern Highlands is administered from a town called Goroka now, but at that time air flights from [unintelligible] landed there. And there were few stores there, trade stores with minimal provisions, but that's all we wanted from them -- canned meat, and some canned fish and I suppose flower and some sugar, and maybe halogen lamps [?] and some kerosene and stuff like that. From Australia we had sent ahead notebooks and we subscribed to -- oh, and lots of books to read, novels. And we subscribed to some journals and magazines that occasionally we could get a mail delivery if we got back up to Okapa station.

So we got two journals that were of great interest. The first one was a big mistake. It was *Man*, we ordered it in a bookstore, and instead of it being the Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, which is called *Man*, it was *Man,* which was a pornographic weekly. So that was that, but the other one was -- we had a subscription to *Time* magazine, within the *Time* magazine in 1962 that we noted this article about cutting up flatworms and feeding them to other flatworms and the recipient flatworms -- the flatworms that were cut up had been educated in the sense that they'd been submitted to shock light or electricity, I've forgotten which, and they learned about the danger and responded in certain ways. And then they cut up those flatworm and fed them to other flatworms and it seemed that the recipient flatworms had the memory of that experience. Right. So we said, "Isn't that amazing?" We discussed it, we laughed about it, we said, "You know, that could be kuru." There was no model for the transmission of kuru as an infectious disease at that time, we were all thinking genetics, but we said, "Isn't that amazing, sounds like a sort of cannibalism." So we started collecting information a little bit more seriously on cannibalism because it was a compelling topic anyway, that we got it a little bit more organized. And then at that time -- I don't know if this will answer your question about supplies --

Interviewer: Oh no, that's good, that's good. I just want to make sure -- yeah, go ahead, go ahead --

SL: We visited the Okapa Station because there was a neurologist, people came through all the time who were interested in kuru, and there was a neurologist there who came through called, Richard Hornebrook, from New Zealand, a lovely man. We went up and we stayed with Bridewell [spelled phonetically] with a doctor -- maybe not Bridewell, maybe Dr. Gray -- anyway, I've forgotten who we stayed with. And Hornebrook asked us a sort of a key epidemiological questions, he said, "What is it that women and children of both sexes do that adult men don't do?" And of course the answer was cannibalism. Adult men were not, on the whole, cannibals, and females were and their children were up to a certain age until little boys left home and were initiated and stopped eating. So we began to gather even more coherent sets of information about cannibalism from that time on. So that's the story about supplies.

We also, during the first year we didn't have a vehicle of our own. We used to walk 12 miles up to Okapa Station and walk back again for the mail and we could actually put in an order that the district office would send to Okapa for us and bring back our mail and also bread occasionally, which was a treat, from a bakery in Kainantu. And so we would walk in and get stuff from one trade store in Okapa station and then walk back again. During the 2nd year we had a University of Adelade Land Rover and we could drive back and forth along that 24-mile round trip.

Interviewer: So when you arrived in the community, and this house was built for you, and you had some supplies and then later you would continue receiving things in the mail to sort of try to stay in touch with the outside world a little bit, how did you begin, at first, interacting with the Fore? Who did you initially talk with? Could you speak Melanesian Pidgeon?

SL: I couldn't at the beginning but Bob Glass [spelled phonetically] had done several years' field work with the Huli. And you can learn Melanesian Pidgeon pretty quickly, and we both spoke to people independently all the time. And I was sort of interested in learning Fore as well. So I remember during the building of our house, beginning to try to -- that was my first intensive interactions with people who crowded around us. I mean, people had never seen -- the missionary's wife was in the South Fore six months but she didn't come out of the house. She and her child were sort of kept behind wire fence, and I don't know that anybody except their house staff got to talk to her or touch her. So I was the first woman that anybody had seen up close and touched, and so lots of people crowded around. Anyway, leaders in the community presented themselves as people that we should -- well you always take note of who presents themselves as representatives of the community to make sure later that they were the right people. But lots of people presented themselves as cooperative and they also were very interested in the all the stuff we brought. They had never seen so much cargo and stuff, and so we were dispersing some of that. We were buying food from them with what was currency at the time, which was salt and tobacco and some money. They were traded shillings at the time, Papa New Guinea didn't have its own currency until 1975 when they had their own currency called the keena [spelled phonetically], but at that time we were using Australian currency as well as trade items.

So I sat around while the house was being built, not participating in that but talking to people and beginning to make up word lists of the things they were bringing in from the forests and parts of the house and then parts of the body and then localities that we could point to from where we were sitting -- you know, this and that, just trying to assemble -- and they were fascinated by my writing. It was very easy, the Fore are very friendly, very sweet people. So we interacted with them rather intensely during the house-building phase. And we also designed the house that was divided in two with a big open room that you entered into that anyone could come into, and then just the private sleeping quarter and bathroom inside and a place where I could go and write up notes [unintelligible]. But the outside room was for them to come in and we put a pot-bellied stove out there too, which is was where we cooked our stuff, and they could come in on a rainy afternoon and were cold and wet and sit around the pot-bellied stove.

Bob took a lot of photographs, and we sent them to Australia and had them developed and they came back -- my mother sent them back in the mail of local people, and so we had a kind of gallery of local people photographed on the walls and they would come in and look at themselves and bring drinks in to see themselves. And so that was a room where we did a lot of our discussions and investigations and informal talk, and also we invited specific people to come in on specific days to have special topic talks with us in that room, and anybody else who wanted to come around that day would come into that room too.

Interviewer: I'm also interested, given that it's a somewhat hierarchical society, or that the men are sort of separated from the women in many ways, how at first did you interact with men and women, and was it different? Were they often in the same place at the same time or would you interact with them in different spaces? Was it easier to interact with one or the other.

SL: It was much easier for me to interact with women in their gardens -- which I did, and also at the menstrual hut, which was set aside for childbirth and menstruation. And I could sit with them there, and that was women's space, and the men didn't -- we laughed and joked and had woman talk in those cases. And when Bob and I went to public events and ceremonies and birth and death, public discussion, the women and the men were present but were seated separately, so I would go and sit frequently with the women but not always with the women because they didn't speak Pidgeon. Sometimes I needed a male translator with me. We had three male translators who trekked around with us all the time, Malaysian Pidgeon speakers who had worked in the past -- in the Fore had worked for the government in other places in Papa New Guinea. There wasn't a whole lot of Pidgeon spoken at that time so we needed Pidgeon translators. Also because very soon we decided we were going to trek around and go into the North Fore of [unintelligible] and west to the Guinea [?] and so we needed translators who could speak Pidgeon across linguistic groups too. So we had male Pidgeon translators with us all the time.

Interviewer: I see, and was it any different for you than it was for Robert Glass in terms of interacting?

SL: Not much. I was in an ambiguous gendered category for the men. I'd come in -- they finally sorted it out that we weren't government officers but we clearly had access to the government, like the Land Rover, and the carpenter, and the District Office that would send us mail with one of his runners, or we would get it from him. So we clearly had access to the government but we weren't government, and we also weren't missionaries. And so they called us -- this is the Old Colonial stuff, they called us "Story Master" and "Story Misses", and that was a sort of an ambiguous and new category, not ambiguous, but a new category; they understood what we were doing because that's what we did all day. And I was in that category, which wasn't a very gendered category. Men would talk to me as well. We did a lot of our fieldwork together.

Interviewer: So you would actually spend time with Robert, collecting fieldwork.

SL: A lot of the time, yes.

Interviewer: But then there were some spaces it seems to me that you might have had access to that Robert didn't, like the menstrual hut --

SL: Yeah, female spaces.

Interviewer: Female spaces. So in a sense, he might have been a little more restricted than you were in terms of where you could collect data?

SL: In terms of where is a what?

Interviewer: In terms of where you could collect data.

SL: Yes, that was true when I did fieldwork in Bangladesh, I could get into female spaces there too in a much more sort of enclosed female space in Bangladesh than in New Guinea. That's true of women anthropologists in many places I think.

Interviewer: Mmm-hmm. And then if you can tell me a little bit, so when did you first start seeing kuru?

SL: We didn't see much kuru when we first arrived. We didn't go in to talk about kuru because we thought, "Let's just talk about life in general and let's just see what we see about kuru as we stumble across it." That was our strategy at first. We didn't want to come in and say, "Line up all your kuru patients and let me see them." And then after we'd been there for ten days or so, we said to one another, "We haven't seen much kuru, where are they? This is the high incidence area." And it turned out -- you probably read this, I wrote about it in the book, that there was a guy who had said he could cure kuru patients, he was a Gimi [?] person from Jason's language group. All the kuru patients in this area who were able to walk, and even those who could only walk with a little stumbling, had left for this place, and so we decided we had to go there. So early on we packed up and went on this pilgrimage, this trek to Gimi country. We walked north to the -- there was a way to get in there, beyond the Okapa Station and across a mountain range and into the Gimi and found the area where he had set up big bamboo huts that were imitation of the Okapa hospital. He was giving indigenous cures to people. So we took a look at all that and then we traveled home by a different route…

Interviewer: Wait, when you were there how many --

SL: Where did we live?

Interviewer: No, well when you went to the Gimi Region, what was that like? Were the people different?

SL: The Gimi were just like the Fore but they had much less contact than the Fore, not that the Fore had much but they were a much more wary bunch of people, a bit more secretive. And we weren't going to stay long, we didn't establish tremendous contacts with the Gimi, I wouldn't say. And in all these places where you go, there were -- the government forced people to build sort of a bamboo and thatch house that was a government house, to sort of keep it ready for any government officer that wanted to come in and -- a health officer or an agricultural officer or a patrol officer coming around doing an annual census or a bi-annual census or an 18-month census as they were doing the first year or two. So there were always these government -- I mean they're just local, in the middle of every hamlet there is one empty building ready for government representatives to occupy. So we occupied those. So we spent that little time talking to the curer and his assistants and getting his life story and the story of the people who were being treated and watched and so forth, and then we got the names of people who had been, to the degree that he could remember, and so instead of taking the northern route back again we went south through the Gimi and back over a different mountaintop and pass into the South Fore, stopping off overnight in various places in these government constructions -- huts -- trying to locate the people who had been for a cure in the Gimi, we did a follow-up to see what had happened to all those people, if the cure had been effective or not, and it hadn't. They were all dying or dead, and we came back home.

Interviewer: So that was within the first several months? Okay, as you were trekking around between the different villages --

SL: Yes, by that time the Fore was starting to come back too. They probably went for a cure for a couple of weeks but we happened to land down the week they all left.

Interviewer: That's so interesting. [laughs] And so as you trekked back you went through a series of villages and you saw the people with kuru, people who had gone for a cure but were still sick or still progressing along the path, and as you started to see more cases what were your thoughts initially? Were you still thinking of it as a heredofamilial disease? What did you think of the severity of the symptoms? What did you see when you looked at these patients?

SL: The course had been described very well by Gajdusek and the symptoms didn't change much over time. There was a sort of early trimmer that the patient notices first. There's a sort of secondary phase where they stumble and have trouble walking and they get uncoordinated and they have to be helped over little fences in and out of their gardens, and their speech is slurred. And then there's a third phase where they're no longer mobile and they don't have control over their bodily functions and sometimes they have [unintelligible], their eyes wander around and their speech is fuddled and very blurry and they may be mentally changed also. That had been defined as a clinical progression by Gajdusek, and that in form is the way we saw it I guess.

Interviewer: I guess I am a little bit curious about how you experienced that, what was it like to suddenly see people…?

SL: It was horrible. It was horrible. I knew I couldn't do anything about it. I wondered if people enjoyed or didn't enjoy talking about it. They didn't seem to mind talking about it. They were sort of interested in us because we were still rather exotic-looking folks. People normally didn't come and sit down and talk and eat with them and just hang around, so they wanted to talk to us. Everybody wanted to talk to us, but this vision of decimation of mainly women -- young, young women, was terrible. It was awful.

Interviewer: Were you ever worried about getting kuru? I can imagine if I were in that situation, it would just be overwhelming. What kind of feelings did you go through thinking about it?

SL: I thought I might get it. I worried every time I got a bit wobbly, when I got exhausted on our trek, or got a headache, which is an early symptom; I thought, "This is it." Since we really didn't know how it was caused. It didn't appear to be entirely genetic.

Interviewer: When did you start figuring out that it might not be genetic? If you can tell me a little bit about your exploration of kinship and how you started to realize that these bonds that people were forming weren't always based on blood relations -- can you tell me a little bit about those stories?

SL: A lot of just classical, social anthropology. Kinship is actually terrific, I'm a big enthusiast of kinship, and you don't just get kinship to find out who was your mother, who was your father? But Bob had done a lot of kinship studies with the Huli. We benefited from that because when he went to the Southern Highlands to work with the Huli it was a part of a project set up by the great S.F. Nadel, of African -- Black Byzantium, and he wrote a very famous article called "Withcraft in Four Societies," which was sort of a controlled comparison of witchcraft in four societies. So he came out to Australia National University [?] and he recruited anthropologists to go to New Guinea Highlands in specific locations so that he could set up some comparative studies, and he encouraged Daphne Ryan [spelled phonetically] to go into the Mende [spelled phonetically], and Bob Glass' vocation in Huli, I think, was part of that.

In any case, Bob came back with kinship data that didn't fit the models of patrilineal kinship, as it was known at that time, based on models from Africa but also on models -- data that had been reported already from other parts of the New Guinea Highlands and was being reported among the Inga [spelled phonetically], for instance, by Mengott and so forth. So he had become very skilled at mapping out kinship relations and so forth. So we did a lot of that, but in the course of doing that we followed who married who, who was matrilineal cross-cousin marriage, and then cross-cousins, in a biological sense. And so we got a lot of information about marriage relations and about fictive relations, about migrant groups that came -- once the administration came in warfare came to a halt, but there were groups who'd come in to other groups for security and allied themselves. So there were a bunch of people who'd come down from the North Fore and were living in the hamlet that we were in who really were not related by kinship very closely, but in the course of time the Fore had developed ceremonial ways of incorporating people into kinship categories and calling them, mothers, brother, and so forth.

So we got a lot on kinship relations and on adoption -- [unintelligible] kids a lot. Kids would go visiting with the mother's brother's sister and not come back for a while, and so forth. It was a much more fluid image of kinship relations. And then you could overlay another tremendous amount of information on the kinship charts that included causes of dance, infant mortality as it was remembered, they tended to forget a lot of people when they told their kinship story but when you actually laid it all out and said, "Was that the first child, the second child, and that child," -- no, there were two or three before that who died in the first couple of months of life, and so forth. So then we had a sort of complete picture, not a complete picture probably but a picture of all the causes of death including kuru. And so we had colored pencils that we used for mapping out kuru deaths and you could just see it, you could just get a visible picture of where it was occurring, how it was occurring. It was just very clear to us about how that was occurring, and it hadn't occurred much in the senior generation. It was occurring among the living adult married women and the young women in the generation we were working with and there were a lot of people, as we now know, who were at risk to come down with it.

So we got a lot of information about kuru but we also got a lot of other categories of courses of death. So what was of great interest were other causes of death and theories of causation of different death. And how that matched or didn't match -- didn't match in many ways but in some ways it did -- Western categories of disease and disease causation. Oh and you could get migrant stories, you could get immigrant and Exodus stories on your kinship charts. I mean, the kinship charts are sort of history books in themselves. So anyway, we did a lot of that.

Interviewer: And as you started creating these charts, how long did it take you to realize that this might not be a heredofamilial disease?

SL: Well, I don't know that we ever -- I think we relied on others to tell us that, that we supplied the information. We worked for a year, and then we went back to Adelade to make a report to Bennett, and wrote a couple of papers on the social lives and origins of kuru and its spread and so forth. And then I presented that at a conference to Bennett in the department, but at a conference that he invited a lot of other people to come to. And among them were the physicians and medical researchers in Australia who were very interested in kuru, interested in blood groups, interested in this and that, and genetics and infectious disease. And Gajdusek was present, too, at that meeting -- it was probably 1963 -- or '63, probably 1962, I'd say -- between field trips.

And so they had that data by then and then we came back to New Guinea and just continued doing our work. And we didn't really interact tremendously with medical researchers except to the degree that they came through and visited us in the field in 1963. Gajdusek came back on his rippin', roarin' trek back and forth to an area further south that interested him, among the finer speaking peoples. But we had visits in the field of other people who passed through. Norma MacArthur [spelled phonetically] came through, a demographer, and stayed with us for about a week looking over the patrol books -- census books that the government had; that each census book was located in each community and held by the government-appointed local leaders called [unintelligible] and [unintelligible]. So that was their job to keep the book and present it to any government person who asked for it. So she was examining them and looking at our genealogies and sort of reconstituting a demographic profile of the South Fore population because there was a tendency of patrol officers to say --

[break in audio]

Interviewer: I got up to the point where you were saying how she looked at your genealogy data and then she started to reexamine her own demographic data, right?

SL: Well, she didn't have any demographic data of her own. She was only looking at the patrol books, and our genealogies, and she was evening out the biases in the patrol books to show that some people were married between the decades, that didn't all clump at 1920 or 1930; she reexamined the demography, she published an article about it. And then another person who came through -- I'd have to look back and see what it was, but we were there from 1961 to 1963 and sometime around that, maybe 1962, the head of the Laye [spelled phonetically] botanical gardens or herbarium, or whatever it was called, came through. I had always been interested in gardening, [laughs] plants, and so I took him through the forests and I had people lined up who I knew were great observers of plants and stuff, and we began that day a botanical collection. And he showed me how to preserve specimens, left me some sort of wire sheets that I put newspaper between and pressed the stuff, and then I could send him these things to the herbarium in Laye after he left and he would identify them for me. So that set me off on a big and continual collection of botanical materials that were used therapeutically, curing for many diseases, for male growth to encourage young boys to grow quicker than girls, which they never do of course, and for other ceremonial purposes, or just add it to food to make it delicious -- not so much to make it delicious but for very therapeutic purposes. So I got a big botanical collection and published that material. So he came through.

But he didn't add much to the genetics. The major in our trip, a huge bunch of very big smoke Australian physicians came through, including MacFarlane Burnett, who became Sir MacFarlane Burnett and got a Nobel Prize for work on infectious disease, and was the head of an institute in Melbourne, and he was interested in kuru. And along with him a bunch of other honchos came through. And we told our story about the recency -- we gave them a moo-moo cooking, with vegetables cooked in the ground and covered by the earth and so forth, and then introduced them to local people and so forth and told them what we knew by that time about the recency of kuru and cannibalism. Actually there's a section in the book he published in the 1970s I think, I'd have to go take a look, called *Infectious Diseases*, in which he recalls that visit. He would recall it very well -- he'd mention us in his book, but he'd recall it very well because in our house, we get them lunch, this cooked vegetable and we also gave them local coffee, which we roasted ourselves and served him coffee. And he put a teaspoonful of what he thought was sugar into his coffee cup and started drinking it, but it was actually a dish of salt that we had on the table that had become -- the trade salt was very granular anyway, and it had accumulated a lot of moisture so it looked like sugar. And so he got a mouthful of salt in his mouth and he coughed and splattered, and look startled. It was one of those moments of great embarrassment, so I'm sure he remembers his field trip to the South Fore quite clearly. But there were several visits like that where people came through from time to time and visited us.

Interviewer: Would you know that they were coming ahead of time?

SL: We would get the information, we must have because we prepared this moo-moo, but probably we didn't get any more than a day or two's notice from Myrt Brytwell, the patrol officer, and they would have come to Okapa Station to see the patients in the hospital. So then they wanted to see the South Fore and so they would come down in government vehicles to the South Fore and just stop off for the day with us. They didn't stay over -- [unintelligible] stayed over for maybe about a week but they'd just come for the day and go back again. Yes, we must have known they were coming because we prepared the moo-moo.

Interviewer: Tell me about Gajdusek, when was the first time that you met him?

SL: I don't remember when that was but it was fairly early on. He came through like a lightning bolt from time to time from NIH and walked right through the area to the area where he liked to go to, for various reasons, and stopped off with us occasionally for one night -- in dinner and one nights. He's brilliant and nuts -- you've met him, I think --

Interviewer: Yeah. [laughs]

SL: It's sort of stream of consciousness conversation, you don't get a word in, but it's fascinating and exhausting. He would come through once or twice, going and coming from this area, and he also sent people who he employed, local people, with autopsy material or whatever it was in [unintelligible] because we had a little old kerosene refrigerator that Myrt Brytwell, the government officer had lent us, so we could the stuff cold overnight and we would feed up and let his runners sleep and then the next morning they'd head off again and get to the Okapa Station and then eventually put it on a [unintelligible] flight and it would get to the National Institutes of Health. He used us as a sort of a post, agent post for sending specimens to NIH.

Interviewer: How far was his favorite site from…?

SL: His favorite site was probably two days' walk south.

Interviewer: Like you were saying it was hard to get a word in edgewise; did you ever talk with him about his ideas of causation or did he ever pick your brains about the data that you had collected?

SL: Not much, no. I mean he knew what we were doing. We told him what we were doing. But he didn't give us much feedback because he, as you know, at that time was not persuaded that cannibalism had anything to do with it.

Interviewer: We haven't talked about this yet. When did you first start hearing about cannibalism or learning about cannibalism from the people? If you could just tell me a little bit about that.

SL: We knew that there was cannibalism in the area because the Bena-Bena were reported to be cannibals and the Burts [spelled phonetically] had worked in North Fore in the 1950s -- '52, '53 -- so we knew, but we didn't start inquiring immediately about cannibalism until -- well we got some data on it but we didn't focus on that in the first couple of months. We were really focusing on locating kuru patients and kinship, and cannibalism during the first couple of months wasn't a persuasive topic for us. But I'd have to go back and see when it was that we met Richard Hornebrook at Okapa Station who asked that key question, "What is it that adult women and children of both sexes do?" So we started intensively collecting information about cannibalism at that time and got a lot of information about body parts, and how the body was prepared, and who ate who, who were the individual who ate a particular body. We got the name of the person who had kuru and then the name of the women and children who ate that person.

Actually, there was another physician called John Matthews [spelled phonetically], terrific guy, Australian physician, who came to do his dissertation associated with his medical degree on kuru. He came to Melbourne and we lent him genealogical records, and he used those subsequently sometime -- '63, '64. We published an article together in Lancet [spelled phonetically] based on it, but he used those records and our information about cannibalism, to go back in better detail and more specifically to locate the person who had died of kuru and the people who had eaten that person, and then he was able to document little flurries of kuru, some five or six years later in that community among those people. That was the study that was published in the Lancet that Bob, and I, and Matthews wrote together.

Interviewer: I've read that study. So you and Robert had provided him with genealogies and then he was the one who sort of kept track over a number of years, looked at your data, and then went back to see if any of those people who had consumed others would have gotten the disease.

SL: That's a key piece.

Interviewer: The key piece of information, yeah.

SL: He was a great scholar, I think.

Interviewer: Can you describe him to me, like what his personality was like, what he looked like?

SL: He was a very gentle person, he's still alive. He came through a couple of years ago with his wife, [unintelligible]. He became the head of some big honcho like the Institutes of Health in Australia. He was in Darwood for a while and then in Melbourne after that, and I think he just retired from that, but he didn't like administrative work he said but he probably was pretty good at it. He became a very distinguished physician in the Australian scene after that. Actually, he'd be somebody for you to interview because he said that now he'd like to write up some of his memories, he's got a lot to write now that he's retired. But he was a very gentle person, a very sweet and good-natured, considerate and gentle person, nice man.

Interviewer: And did he live in the same village that you lived in or would he travel the whole time?

SL: Don't think so. He probably stayed. I don't know, he might have occupied it, other people did. Gajdusek's photographer, Ed Sorensen [spelled phonetically] occupied it immediately after we left in '63 for a while and did his own study for a dissertation in anthropology, subsequently. He might have. He might have also stayed with another person who I've mentioned yet, Michael Alpers, who came during our second year, 1963, to study kuru. He's a physician and he is quite close to Carleton Gajdusek and spent some time gathering data with Carleton and trekking around with Carleton in the 1960s. And then subsequently, Carleton invited him to go to the NIH in Washington. He did that for a while and then he came back to New Guinea and then he became the Director of the Institute of Medical Research in Goroka and just retired from that this year. So what did I start talking about him for?

Interviewer: Well, we were talking about John Matthews. So he basically came -- I'm just trying to understand the timing here.

SL: Right, so Matthews might have stayed in Alpers' house, because Alpers built a house that was about an hour or more walk away from us in a place called Weisser [spelled phonetically] and so Matthews might or might not have stayed in our house, I'm not sure.

Interviewer: So did you overlap with Matthews?

SL: No.

Interviewer: Matthews came after you and Robert had finished?

SL: Yes.

Interviewer: Okay, got it. So how did you get the genealogical material to him? Did he visit you before he went to New Guinea?

SL: I think I can remember talking to Matthews in -- oh no I don't. No, it was somebody else. No, I'd say on the whole I don't think we ever left with Matthews. So go back again, next question.

Interviewer: In terms of the genealogical data, how did he obtain that from you?

SL: How did what? How did he obtain it?

Interviewer: Yes.

SL: He came to my house in Melbourne, my parent's house, and I guess we Xeroxed it and gave it to him.

Interviewer: And tell me a little bit more about Michael Alpers. Did you spend time with him just for fun?

SL: Sure, we were great pals with Michael, I still am. I was just invited to what was probably his 70th birthday party in Western Australia, but I sent a postcard instead. So we've kept in touch over the years, and in subsequent years. He's a good friend, and he did a lot of -- he was interested in the culture, interested in sort of the anthropology of it. And he's a physician who's interested in epidemiology of it, and the medical aspects of it. He had a field house that he went to in the South Fore and spent a lot of time and had close relationships with people in that part of the South Fore. He's a very generous person. The local primary school is named after him because I think he's been very generous to local people. And he continued to be interested in all aspects of health care and medical research. In Papa New Guinea, once he became the director of the institute in Goroka. He was the editor of the Papa New Guinea medical journal for some years, I don't know who is now, he might still be doing it. But we would see one another from time to time and he and his wife and children had a house on the Okapa patrol post, it wasn't such a terrific place for his wife and children in the village. He just had little babies there. So we would go into the Okapa patrol post from time to time, have dinner with Michael, stay probably with Brytwell, or an empty house on the station and we became good social friends as well as communicating about the Fore.

Interviewer: Yeah, that's wonderful. So after this -- I'm just trying to piece together a little bit here, the way your thinking evolved about perhaps the causation of kuru. So after the conversation --

SL: The conversation about kuru, yes.

Interviewer: Yes. The conversation that you had with Richard Hornebrook, where he asked you this critical question, and then you and Robert --

SL: [unintelligible] bring back more coherent data about cannibalism as a result of that because we thought that was the answer to that epidemiological question.

Interviewer: And then what did you do after that? What did you do with this new conviction? How did you and then Robert --

SL: [unintelligible] about it, you know? Everybody who came through we told MacFarlane Burnett and we told Gajdusek and we told anybody who came through. But we were in the field then and we didn't publish anything about it for a couple years, except this thing with Matthews, and then Bob later gave a paper. Well, we had these [unintelligible] styled notes that we delivered to Public Health that National Institutes of Health subsequently copied and distributed. A lot of people remember and have reported in their subsequent publications that that's what we were talking about. The missionaries in the South Fore down in Perasa I had a note from Myrt Brytwell, who had a nice ironic sense of humor, saying that the missionaries were a bit of a trial for him. So the missionaries in the South Fore were very disturbed at research because we were going around asking everybody about cannibalism when it was the Christmas season and everybody should be focused on Christ and the Christmas celebration, so they were really troubled about that couple in the South Fore who were changing the tone of Christmas.

Interviewer: That's great. [laughs] If you can recall, and you might not be able to but can you recall what the response of Mac Brunett or Carleton Gadjusek or Mike Alpers were to the idea that it could be cannibalism?

SL: I don't remember specifically with Michael -- I mean we talked about everything and I don't remember specifically with Michael. Carleton exhibited no reaction; MacFarlane Burnett looked fascinated and subsequently wrote that he was in his book of infectious disease, a little book called *Infectious Disease,* published in the 1970s -- '72/'73, where he recalled us telling him about it. And also my brother's a historian and he sent me a letter that was sent by the head of -- I don't know what he was called, the governor general or what he was called -- Sir John Gunther who is a marvelous person, who was the head of administration in Papa New Guinea in those days. I guess he read our reports -- did they become reports? Anyway, my brother knew him because my brother subsequently went to Papa New Guinea to teach history in the university.

And then around '74 he was asked to be vice chancellor of the University of Papa New Guinea, which is equivalent to being the president of a university. So during the year or two of transition from colonial rule to self-government, my brother was there and interacted at that level with officials. So he became quite friendly with Sir John Gunther, and somewhere in my files I probably have a letter that Gunther wrote to my brother saying how impressed he was at our fieldwork on cannibalism and the contribution that he'd made. So that was probably -- that was probably '74, something like that. So our story had filtered through the public health department and through government and this and that, certainly.

Interviewer: Mmm-hmm. I'm interested, particularly though, in Carleton Gadjusek's response because I was just reading the collection of career letters, the collection of Carleton's letters back and forth to people and in the preface to that book he says that when he initially went there he thought it was cannibalism --

SL: Say that again, I didn't quite catch it.

Interviewer: He said that when he initially arrived in New Guinea that everyone thought it was cannibalism and --

SL: Oh they didn't, everybody didn't think it was cannibalism, that's -- that's Carleton. He -- and people will tell you this, Mike Alpers will tell you this too, because he's closer to Carleton than I am --Carleton, in retrospect, is not well-placed to portray what he was thinking at the time. Everybody in the Fore were cannibals, that's true, that wasn't anything we didn't know before. But to talk about cannibalism in relationship to kuru was something that not everybody did except they might have joked about it, perhaps-- the occasional person might have made a joke about it, but not everybody was talking about it and Carleton was in the difficult position to tell the story in a way that allowed him to keep a [unintelligible] the early days when he did not adopt the notion.

Interviewer: That's important because --

SL: I know somebody -- Buck [unintelligible]'s second wife had met with him sometime a year or two ago and he said it to her.

Interviewer: And what did she say? [laughs]

SL: And what did she say?

Interviewer: Yeah. [laughs]

SL: I don't know what she said. That he was gratified, I guess.

Interviewer: Right, but that's interesting because he portrays -- it's very critical for me to understand this, how this happened because really you and Robert Glass were the first two people to collect the data that then would allow others like John Matthews [spelled phonetically] to make the connections that would then solidify --

SL: He was very persuaded by it too.

Interviewer: -- that would then solidify the relationship of cannibalism to the spread of kuru. It wasn't something -- maybe people joked about it but it wasn't something that people had any data about until you two went to the --

SL: Carleton was distinctly a non-participant in it. And then when he did feel ready enough to talk about it he didn't want to say it was cannibal, he said it was cuts and scrapes and nasal mucous -- you know, where they rubbed their noses, sort of a disgusting image of people acquiring this disease by -- through autopsies and then rubbing the stuff on their faces.

Interviewer: Right, right. Okay, well that's good, just to clarify that, of course. So you went and you started collecting more intensively data about cannibalism, and is that what you spent the bulk of your time doing after that? What did you focus on from there until you had to return?

SL: I don't know what we focused on from then. You know, I did a botanical collection, I was interested in other diseases, I was interested in social change. I mean, I've been back during the '90s in -- I went back in 1970 once, and then I went back in 1991, 1993, 1996 and 1999. And the things that I am interested in are tracking the end of the epidemic, but also the sort of social transformation of the whole political economy and people's way of life has always been of interest to me. And even in the years when we first arrived, Fore society was changing. New cash crops were entering and new vegetables were coming just by indigenous routes, new species of sweet potato would just be coming on a network sort of connection from the towns of Kainantu and Goroka, through people who would travel there and bring home little runners of very prolific sweet potatoes so that the old species of sweet potatoes that I remember when I went back in the 1990s were no longer grown anymore. And I'd had the name -- you know, since I was interested in gardening and botanical lists I would ask them where is this particular type of sweet potato that I had a very great preference for. They said, "Oh we don't grow that anymore!" They were amazed and delighted, and they said, "Maybe we might be able to find one of those sweet potatoes." So that the whole -- beans and onions, spring onions, and sweet corn -- you know, there was a whole transformation of the gardening landscape and the nutritional aspects. And then some canned fish particularly entered into people's diet -- well, the two religious groups started flooding the area too. And Seventh-Day Adventists have got a big hold, and amazingly there are almost no pigs in the South Fore anymore. People have given up pigs.

Interviewer: Wow.

SL: Some Adventists don't eat pork.

Interviewer: That is amazing. [laughs]

SL: It is amazing. And informants of mine, a little boy -- people who were little boys and who worked in my little -- helped me cooking in the early days, just little ten-, twelve-year-old kids, by the time I'd got back had become Seventh-Day Adventists and expressed repulsive and nausea at the site of a pig on the road.

Interviewer: Wow.

SL: It's amazing. So it's very interesting stuff. So I was always interested in everything else as well, and you know cannibalism is just one -- a couple of files.

Interviewer: Right, one piece of what's happening. When you originally went there, can you tell me a little bit about what the Australian -- I mean, you've told me a little bit about particular people in the Australian administration but what sort of changes were they trying to institute at the time and --

SL: They were trying to stop people fighting and bring people into open spaces in hamlets that would be easier to observe and monitor and take census material from. And also to deliver healthcare. In addition to the census material and the control of warfare, they also took a responsibility for healthcare and the [unintelligible] yors [spelled phonetically], wiping out yors, and pains, and goiter they were looking for. That's had a lot of goiter in other parts of New Guinea and they were looking out for that. You know, there were big health campaigns that went on -- leprosy, they were looking for lepers and they would take lepers up for care, take lepers out of the community for care in various health places in the North Fore and so forth. And road building, they wanted to build roads through so that there was sort of compulsory labor one day a week where the local appointed leaders [unintelligible] -- it was [unintelligible] labor, you know. People had to come and were responsible for keeping their section of the road open for Land Rovers to go through. Because it was important to have access in and out, for an administration. And that's all gone by the road now. I mean, people are more rambunctious now and the roads are terrible. And the roads are almost impossible. There were huge ruts that filled with water and landslides, and really just awful, awful, awful roads now. And they are all cut up by coffee trucks that come through buying coffee and so forth and churning up the roads, and a lot more vehicles coming along the roads now. There was only the Adelade University vehicle and government patrol officer vehicles and maybe the missionary in the South Fore might have had a vehicle, I can't remember. But there weren't many vehicles that came down in the 1960s, but you know the roads are torn to pieces now and not maintained. But that was something that the government did in those days.

Interviewer: That's too bad. And when you went back in 1970 how was it different? What was the government focusing on then, or what were the relations?

SL: Well they're still doing this because they didn't get self-government until '75.

Interviewer: Till '75, ok. And what about enforcement? If the government said that they wanted people from the South Fore to come out and work on the road at a certain point in time, what would they do if they refused to go do that?

SL: Well they didn't refuse to do it. This is a colonial period in which when the government comes around they have these big, big Papa New Guinea policemen from the coast, you know, great big guys with guns and stuff. And it was clear that their economy had been lost. And you took your orders from the government. And also, if there was a sort of group of people whose road wasn't being maintained well then the government officer would come down and harangue them, accompanied by policemen, native policemen, and harangue them. And also, the other thing that they did was hold court cases -- hold court cases that the government would send word ahead -- you know, "Wednesday week we'll be in your community to hold court cases;" land disputes, and abduction of women, and rape and so forth and so on. And they encouraged local people to take care of their own problems themselves but if they reached an impasse and indigenous ways of conflict resolution weren't working then the government would hold a court and each side would be represented, you know, be allowed to speak. And then the Kia [spelled phonetically], the government officer, would say who was at fault and what had to happen; pay a fine, or this woman has to go back to her family, or you have to pay for an apartment that was damaged by your pigs. If it was your pig and these people have lost all their sweet potato gardens and so you have to pay them such and so forth. So that there was a sort of a judicial system set in place that was monitored. And during those trips he could exert fines on any group of people whose section of the road was not well maintained.

Interviewer: I see, okay. Can you tell me a little bit about the -- I'm probably going to pronounce this incorrectly -- the Kibungs? [spelled phonetically]

SL: Oh the Kibungs yes. People -- around about 1965, which was about the peak of the epidemic in the South Fore, people were tremendously agitated about the death and mortality and loss of women. And so they held public meetings in which they denounced sorcerers and confessed -- they were like great big, sort of, Quaker meetings. They held confessional sessions and pledged that in the future they wouldn't carry up underground warfare [laughter] or in the future. And it was sort of a cleansing of the communities of people who harbored suspicions that other people had killed their wives -- you know, everybody -- there were huge public confessions. And the women were present who had kuru -- you know, they didn't directly say, "This man over there, we think he's the cause," nobody really ever directly says, "So-and-so is suspected," but we all know the group -- the group that we have an animus towards, you know the old competitive and defense that some people are not your friends swings around from time to time. Some of the time if a lot of your women died that you think were killed by people in one community then there are pretty bad relations between that community and another community. And that swung around quite a bit. Sometimes it was a bunch of people to the south of us called Camilla [spelled phonetically] and sometimes it was a bunch of people where Michael Alpers was called Weisser [spelled phonetically]. And there were a lot of bad interchanges back and forth and fear of entering one another's territory during that time.

So the Kibungs kind of washed away those feelings temporarily. People came together in great congregations in different places, -- in Weisser one day, in Camilla another day, in Wanatobli [spelled phonetically] another day. And everybody trekked around and they ate together and had these communal -- confessional -- that they thought would bring an end to the epidemic.

Interviewer: And did you ever meet the Burnts?

SL: I don't think we did. My memory on that -- I've gone back and back over that. I always wanted to meet Catherine Burnt, so I don't think I ever met her. I might have met Ronald Burnt. They were in Western Australia and I never got closer than Sydney. I came from Melbourne and then I studied in Sydney. Where I met Ronald [unintelligible] -- still a little hazy in my mind? I don't have a strong impression though I do remember a great big sort of bear of a man and maybe I met him once. I never met Catherine. Catherine always seemed to me to be a very interesting woman who -- and I wrote to her once -- she collected a lot of -- she was a good linguist, and she also collected a lot of stories from the North Fore and adjacent areas, and one of the things I was always interested in were these indigenous, what we call folk stories but not really, they're more than that, and you know that representation -- the change over time about one's sense of oneself and one's sense of one's own community and place in it in society and so forth. So there are a lot of indigenous stories around about animals and the origin of animals and that about little bush spirits and about the morality. There are various kinds of stories -- there are moral stories that says you should obey your big brother and the big brother should take care of the little brother. There are moral stories, but there are also sort of more fantasy-like stories that tell you a lot about people's consciousness. And I was always fascinated by that, and the ways in which historical consciousness changes, that's always been of interest to me. So Catherine Burnt has somewhere unpublished data, I think it was never published, on the collection of loads of these stories. It never got published, so if I ever met her I would remember that. I don't think I ever met her.

Interviewer: Yeah that's too bad, that sounds amazing. I also am aware that the government had some certain anthropologists. And did you ever meet any of them?

SL: Charles Julius [spelled phonetically] and people who were sent in. No that was before we got there, I don't remember meeting Charles Julius either.

Interviewer: Okay. So you spent all this time there, I mean basically two years collecting data, and then what did you do after that when you went back to Australia?

SL: Went to Bangladesh.

Interviewer: You went to Bangladesh after that?

SL: And you know, working on cholera. We got this reputation for having worked in a medical context, and I had a friend when I was studying anthropology at Sydney University called Robert Braddock [spelled phonetically]. He was a distinguished malariologist, and he was the head of tropical medicine, School of Tropical Medicine, at Sydney University. And he and I, since I've done English literature and language degree in Melbourne University before I came, we were sitting in, we were the older people in the class. So together we sort of became pals in anthropology. He was a very nice man. And he was on a lot of international health committees and so he heard of the request for somebody to go to Bangladesh and he said -- and he knew Bob Glass and I had done this work in Papa New Guinea and so he recommended -- asked us if we would be interested in that. And so off we went, and so, almost with no break between fieldwork in New Guinea and then fieldwork in Bangladesh for the next couple of years.

Interviewer: Wow [laughs], that's incredible. During the time that you were in Bangladesh and doing completely different fieldwork did you think about New Guinea sometimes?

SL: A little bit but not much, Bangladeshis pretty overwhelming. It really is. We were working on kuru and cholera, diarrheal disease. And no, I'd say that fieldwork is pretty intensive and I lived in the village and I was learning Bengali and had another whole project and it wasn't until I came out of the field in Bangladesh that I came back after that and wrote my MA material. So that was 1971, so there is a big gap between '63 in New Guinea initially, and then 1970 going back once. I came to New York sometime around 1965 I think and remarried by then. Remarried to John Lindenbaum and Bob Glass married somebody else. So that's when I began looking at my field notes sometime, I'd say, around when I came to the United States and came out of Bangladesh. I'd have to look at when that was, maybe 1966-67.

Interviewer: Wow, so it was basically there were a few years before you could go back and analyze the data that you had collected and think about how to publish it or how to present it then to the outside world.

SL: Yes. Right.

Interviewer: And what about John Bennett [spelled phonetically] in all of this, what ever happened to him?

SL: Yeah, I don't know. Because the genetic hypothesis sort of evaporated more or less. It probably -- maybe genetic elements in it, but his -- the Nobel Prize was always a dream for these folks and I think he -- a lot of people smelled the Nobel Prize in it from early on and so the geneticists thought there was a Nobel Prize in it for them and then it was clear that there wasn't, and then the whirlwind called Gajdusek took over. And I'm sure he didn't have any relationship with John Bennett particularly.

Interviewer: Right, right. So then you were in New York, and did you have an academic appointment initially?

SL: Yeah, shortly after I came back I didn't -- my husband did, he was academic medicine, John Lindenbaum. But I was asked by somebody, actually [unintelligible] Freidel [spelled phonetically] who subsequently became President of the American Anthropology Association who was teaching at Queens College then to be her TA. And what I did was, I read the exam papers from her class. And then the next semester I was offered a job at York College teaching as an adjunct. It might have been the next semester, either the next semester or the next year, I got an appointment as an assistant professor at York College, and I've been teaching ever since. I studied in the city in [unintelligible] for a while, and then I moved to the New School Graduate Program, the New School in social research for about ten or twelve years and then I came back to the City University Graduate Center and that's where I am now.

Interviewer: I'm just gonna switch tapes again, is that okay? And then I just have a couple…

[break in audio]

Interviewer: If you can tell me a little bit about your interactions afterwards with the community of prion researchers. Basically, were people still interested in your research and aware of your research before you published, or was it after you published your book that people became aware of the contributions that --

SL: Probably after I published the book.

Interviewer: And then what happened, can you tell me a little bit about interactions you had thereafter?

SL: Not many interactions at all because the book was '79. [laughs] The most reaction came from was Bill Aaronson [spelled phonetically] who didn't think that cannibalism existed. He wanted to draw me into debates about that over the years, which I kept out of. But Prusiner I met when he came -- when Prusiner got the Nobel Prize there was a dinner for him that -- he came around on the circuit giving talks and since my husband was the chair of the Department of Medicine at that time at Columbia Medical School, I went to talk and then I saw next to Prusiner at dinner. And so we became -- we communicated with one another then. And that was the slow virus days, right? But the prion days -- you know more about that than I do -- are very recent, and John what's-his-name in London...

Interviewer: Collinge. John Collinge.

SL: Yes. I met him when I had to give a couple of lectures in Oxford a couple of years ago, and they asked me who I might like to have in attendance. And I said, you know various people I had met, not just in kuru but various other people in academic life in [unintelligible]. So I said I'd like him to be invited, so that was the first time I met him and we spent little time together after the lecture and we've communicated since. And also, he employed an anthropologist who I knew and met during the 1990s to collect a lot of data for him, Jerome Woodfield [spelled phonetically] who did an MA in anthropology from the London School of Economics or somewhere. But he spent years in New Guinea working for the Prion Institute in England collecting blood data and all sorts of other information for them. And I met Jerome and he's a terrific fellow. He's now, I think, with Michael Alpers in Western Australia. And Michael is also now sort of in contact with the prion crowd as well. Carleton has retreated to whatever kind of life he's living in Europe. You know more than that because you saw him recently.

Interviewer: Right. I wonder if you could just…

SL: But the prion stuff is pretty recent, and a lot of the information --John Collinge went to New Guinea once or twice to take a look at the place himself, but most of the data -- most of the most recent data would be sort of specific data that he was requesting from Jerome, his field assistant.

Interviewer: Right. And then is this data that he then would go on to use in generating the hypothesis that he made about cannibalism and the prion --

SL: Well yes, you know I don't know, they must have read our stuff on cannibalism. Jerome then asked me how widespread is cannibalism in the world because they had this hypothesis. And so I said, well, at that time there was a dispute among archaeologists and, well, Bill Aaronson -- people who persuaded by him didn't buy into it. And so there's that, and it wasn't until this last year that I decided to write an annual review and stay on the topic just to sort of clear my head, and to put it on the record of what we thought about the history of cannibalism and how widespread it was, predominantly in the South Pacific where the literature is the richest. So that annual review essay is coming out this year. So they did consult Jerome about cannibalism and Jerome consulted me, but I didn't have all the information at my fingertips about how widespread cannibalism had been because I hadn't done a survey of that kind until last year. [laughs]

Interviewer: Right [laughs], that makes sense. And I love the way that you end that essay -- because I had just read it a week or two ago -- about how -- there was something I wrote down that I really liked, but it was basically how it calls into question, or it calls us to reflect on cannibal activities among ourselves, as well as others. And you bring up in there the example from the prion field of, well, pituitary hormones, pituitary drive hormones. I mean, there are so many things that we do nowadays that involve incorporating parts of one person's body into another's, and you don't really think of it in terms of cannibalism, yet if one were to look at it from a different perspective it might appear very similar.

SL: Right. We think we don't do it anymore.

Interviewer: Right. [laughs]

SL: Or we didn't do it recently, you know, but it was quite recent. When the blood of recently executed criminals in Europe and, you know, [unintelligible] pharmacies [?] still had stuff that they advertised, that were body parts regenerating health until quite recently in Europe.

Interviewer: Recently I was reading a book on the history of blood transfusions, and they were talking about how for a while it was very popular, especially in Russia --

SL: Yes.

Interviewer: Yes, [laughs] you know about this.

SL: A lot of the HIV stuff, a lot of -- at childbirth I think they add umbilical blood or something. They give blood to recently born children in many parts of Eastern Europe, which is really not a help.

Interviewer: No. But they actually were using the blood of people who had already died for a while. They would take recently dead people and drain their blood and use that for transfusion too. I just wanted to close sort of by asking you about the ways in which you feel that your early research with the Fore has impacted your views on things that you would come to study later or perhaps influenced the direction in which you have gone with your career.

SL: Well I think all anthropologists feel that the scales have fallen from their eyes, you know. Not so much while you're in the field, where you see and talk to people who have different views from your own and different ways of living, but when you come back to your own society and your own society looks really bizarre. The assumptions that, particularly in this campaign season where you hear all this crap -- I'll say it -- from the Republicans mainly, about family values and the way the family consists of a male and a female -- you know, its ridiculous. Our own society looks, not just one example, but our own society looks really particularly bizarre when you come back from intense fieldwork anywhere else. And I think that's healthy, to have a sense that your way of life is just one way of life. And you don't have to necessarily live it that way.

Interviewer: In some ways one of the big impacts it's had on you is the way it's caused you to reflect on our own culture and our own society.

SL: Yeah, I think all anthropologists do that. I think that was a very Boasian thing. It was not so much a British thing, you know Margaret Mead and more philosophically-leaning anthropologists tend to do that. There is some reflective aspect, I think, to all anthropology, even if you are not consciously thinking about that aspect of your work.

Interviewer: Well is there anything else that you can think of that you would like to add on this topic?

SL: One thing that strikes me is that the Fore are very disgruntled now, unfortunately. You know, from the sort of open and sweet, this had partly to do with kuru, which they feel others have come in and investigated and they didn't profit from it much. But it's mainly because they haven't profited much from what they call development. That the big mining, [unintelligible] mining, and the gold and copper multi-national corporations are located elsewhere in New Guinea. And many of the young men have worked there on wages for a little bit and come back home and then they're not home for long and their wages are all leeched out in kinship obligations, and they're back where they started and just have to go back gardening again. And they have desires; they want to have walkmen and whatever-whatever. And now they have huge families because their healthcare has done a lot to do away with infant mortality so they have huge families and they want to educate their children, and education costs a lot. You have to have money to send your kids to school, to pay for the school teachers salaries and so forth, and they don't really have that much in the Eastern Highlands. And so in the Eastern Highlands, especially in the Fore field, in a state of demoralization and despair at the moment, it's really a sad mood. And it's nothing I can do about it, you know. That's where they are at the moment, in the history of Papa New Guinea, and coffee prices and that's where they are.

Interviewer: It's really sad.

SL: They're a bit despondent, [unintelligible] despondent. And rightly so. So that's a sadness for me. I get letters from them and I communicate back and so forth, and try to help some of them send their kids to school and so forth. But there's not much you can do overall to fix the Eastern Highlands of Papa New Guinea for the Fore. So that's what I want to say. The mood has changed, and the Fore -- and especially for the people that I worked with very closely who were very young men then and who are heads of families now, they are in a particularly difficult transitional moment because they didn't go to school publicly if ever, and if they did maybe for one year or something. The schools weren't there then for them; the schools didn't exist when they were small. And so they're an adult group of people who are smart, particularly one or two of them who have close connections with politicians, one in particular I am thinking of had close connections with politicians at [unintelligible], he's really a brilliant young fellow, well not so young anymore, but he doesn't speak English, you know. And he can't write. And a lot of -- when they're together with some of his friends who are maybe a year or two younger and five or six or ten years younger who had a different -- we all have to speak Pidgeon for his benefit and can't speak English, and you know, we're considerate for him, but it's humiliating for him. But anyways, so there's a generation of sort of transitional people who are adults in their community now who have missed out all around. Not only has the Eastern Highlands missed out all around but there is an adult population of men who should be the elders, and not even elders, you know -- the sort of force in their communities who can't do that fully.

Interviewer: That is really sad. Do you think there is anything that could have been done to prevent that?

SL: No, I don't think so. We interact with them, I interact with them as much as I can. There's nothing I can do to personally solve their problems. They're like a generation who have come through -- a society who may have been initiated, in male initiation as young children, but who are not initiated into the kind of society that exists now, through education, formal education. And you know, it's just a big Evangelical -- its no surprise that Evangelical Christianities are sweeping like wildfire through lots of New Guinea, but very much so in this area. So that's what I wanted to say.

Interviewer: So the whole culture too is completely, like you said, the old ways are gone.

SL: Not that the old ways are gone. There's been a regeneration of putting young men through initiation again.

Interviewer: Oh really? Wow, that's good. I mean, that's interesting.

SL: Not the whole kit ‘n kaboodle. They’re in seclusion for maybe ten days but they’re not taken off onto terrible ordeals through the forest, and so forth. They have some painful experiences, but there’s a feeling that there’s some identity formation that’s required of young men now. And so they’re a lot older than the group that I saw in the early 1990s who had been in seclusion and came out that day -- were in their early 20s and late teens I’d say, which is much older than the old days with the photographs I have of little kids who were in initiation were about eight, nine, ten, and eleven. But you know, it’s an effect to sort of recoup the cultural identity. That’s good.

Interviewer: Yeah. [laughs] Definitely. Wow. I guess, is there anything else you can think of or is that--

SL: No, I’d say it’s a bit spooky being archived. [laughter] I don’t think of myself as archivable material.

Interviewer: Right, right, no, I can imagine. [laughter] But you have been through a lot. You really have been through a lot. And I think very few people have seen through so many stages --

SL: I’m sure I’ll think of other things -- you know, when I looked in my diary and I saw that I was going to talk to you today I thought, “Gee, I should just make a list of people’s whose names are going to come up.” Even a half hour before we spoke, I came up with a couple, so I’m sure I’ve forgotten a lot of stuff. But anyway that’s it.

Interviewer: Well what I’ll do is email you, and you can always add things. You can add a little postscript or whatever and that’s fine. Okay, well hold on, I’m going to switch you off of speakerphone so I can talk to you normally.

[break in audio]

End of transcript